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ABSTRACT

In this talk, a principal and assistant principal take turns relating personal day-to-day experiences as partners in a management team in a way that shows why they favor shared leadership with assignment of responsibilities based on strengths and needs rather than on tradition. Besides relating anecdotes, the authors question the effectiveness of the traditional separation of the principal's and assistant principal's jobs and instead advocate a team relationship that is in tune with the goals and needs of today's schools. They do warn however, that the approach has some problems, including lack of understanding by colleagues, perceived loss of power, and legal restrictions on power sharing. Included in the paper is their Management Team Task Assessment Form, which can be used in determining which member of the team assigns or performs each of the tasks of the principalship. (Author/JM)

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Two Heads ARE Better!

Carolyn W. Hartley

Patricia Brown

We are separatists by tradition. Tradition has built-in resistance to change, even in the 80's. This "separatism" is seen first of all in:

1. Separate job descriptions. These are the formal documents which outline the responsibilities of administration -- but separately.

2. This separation is also seen in the different perceptions of the two roles by various publics. For example:

   a. Board members tend to see assistant principals as second-class citizens.

   b. Chief school administrators see them as "stand-ins."

   c. Staff members see the assistant principal as "second best" -- the one you go to if you can't get to the principal.

   d. Students often see the position as "the one that gets you in trouble."

   e. And community members see the assistant principal as "the junior executive."

   f. Few of the publics would describe the two administrators in a school as a management team, because it rarely is the case. Even where you find areas delegated by the superordinate principal to the subordinate assistant, those assignments are usually based on traditional roles with little consideration given to the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals within these positions.

      Examine your district's job descriptions. Most automatically assume that the assistant principal is "good" at supervising extra-curricular activities and maintenance, but they also imply that it is unnecessary for the assistant to keep abreast of the latest developments in educational research.

Society has changed since the birth of the assistant principal and is continuing to change at an extremely rapid pace. The demands placed on schools reflect that change. We are asked to counsel children of divorced parents (and the divorced parents themselves); provide sex education; (provide special education facilities for handicapped youngsters;) provide programs for the "exceptionally" talented youngsters; (help students through seemingly terminal puberty;) and write individual educational plans for students... just to mention a few expectations and regulations with which you must deal every day. Child advocates and vocal parent lobbies abound to see that these mandates are met. There are more assistant principals than ever before, especially at the middle school and elementary school level. We must re-evaluate the role of the principal and assistant principal in light of these changes and consciously carve out a position that is in tune with the goals and needs of today's schools. The Management Team Task Assessment can be a useful tool for beginning that review.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Management Team Task Assessment was designed to help you assess the management style operating in your building. Are you and your assistant principal operating in the more traditional separatist approach, where only the principal is responsible or has delegated some or all of the responsibility? -- or are you operating more in the team approach, where the principal and assistant principal together decide who is responsible and many of the responsibilities are shared? Perhaps your style is a little of both; or maybe the style varies from topic to topic. This scale should help to give you a better idea of what style or styles you are really using.

Even if you agree that this approach looks good on paper, I am sure you are questioning just how effective such an arrangement would be when faced with the day-to-day realities of administering a school. Well, it's been our experience that the management teadm approach has helped us deal successfully with many difficult situations.

Do you remember that incident with the kindergarten child last fall? That was quite a test. Mrs. Gerbino, a brand-new teacher, was greeting each kindergarten child at the bus stop; she noticed Ann seemed a little disoriented. In fact, she apparently missed the step. When the teacher took her by the hand, she saw a note crumpled tightly in her fist. I never will forget the note -- it said: "My daughter took a whole bottle of prixilin tablets. Would you please check and see if she's OK? I didn't know she'd taken them until I'd looked at the bottle and saw that it was empty. Thank you. Mrs. Wagner" With that, Mrs. Gerbino sent for you as she rushed to find the nurse. I was at a conference in another town. When you arrived at the nurse's office... you remember?... the nurse was actually quoting regulations to the teacher, saying that the child would have to be sent home, since the pills had not been taken <u>on the school grounds.</u> As the administrator in the building, you took decisive action and stated, "To hell with regulations; a child's life is at stake!" After calling the Poison Control Center and being told that an overdose of this medication is likely to be fatal, the Assistant Principal made the crucial decision to break the rule which saved that child's life. She was in a coma for five days, and, if Ann had been sent home as per regulations, she would have died... yes, that was a nerve-shattering experience.

What about this one, Carolyn? You know how much you hate working with budgets?... how you'd rather be in the classroom with the staff. We had decided, at the beginning of the year, that we would work together closely on the budget preparation. As it turned out, it was a good thing we made that arrangement so that we both had the same information. Do you remember the violent case of the flu that you came down with two days before the budget was to be officially presented to the Chief School Administrator? There was no way that you could have come in to finish the work that had to be done and no way you could have made the presentation, which couldn't be postponed. Because I had been involved in the budget preparation from the beginning, I was able to complete the budget packet and make a clear and thorough presentation to the Chief School Administrator.

Yes, that was a time it really worked well. We had acted as members of a real management team.

Yes. Remember the time the Board member and parent of a girl in our school called? She wanted to talk to you, but you weren't there, so she spoke with me. Her daughter, whom she had always perceived as gifted and talented, had come home crying because she was pulled out of her class to be placed in a remedial compensatory

education class, without any prior notice. The Board member expressed her concern as a parent and as a Board member. If we had been operating on the separatist approach, I would have probably taken the information and told her you would call her back. Under our approach, I spoke at length with the Board member. Then I spoke with the teacher and called the Board member back with more information about what had really happened. We spoke about the program, her perception of her child and where to go from there. Although the Board member was less than happy with what had happened, after our conversation she was pleased that her concern had been addressed quickly. It would seem that she had understood the team approach because she didn't call you the next day, nor did you feel the need to call her.

Yes, Pat, that was another example of a time that it really paid for both people to be working closely together in a situation. I guess the bottom line as to whether this approach works or not is if we, as principals, feel confident enought in you as assistant principals to actually give you the final authority to make decisions and to stick by you even though those decisions might be wrong. Perhaps the best example of this is -- remember the Denmark Connection? I think it's probably the closest you ever came to quitting. There were a lot of "heavies" coming down for all of us during this time... and... remember? ... I called you into the office and said, "Pat. Guess what? I really have a terrific opportunity. I've been invited to participate in a two-week conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. I really want to go! I'd like you to be in charge of the building." Folks, that's trust! And I have to say, in front of Pat, that she did a fantastic job. The building was extremely well run, and I had total confidence during my two weeks in Denmark that it was in good hands. That kind of trust doesn't come about overnight; it doesn't come about automatically; but, when you work with each other closely to cultivate that kind of team spirit, you can make it happen!

But... I got even. I'll never forget the Monday morning I was told at 8:15 that a parent chaperone had broken her arm and at 9:00 I was going to camp for a week with 150 third, fourth and fifth graders. I know I left behind some unfinished tasks and I must say now, Carolyn, you did an outstanding job of filling in!

Seriously, I'm sure that you all have a myriad of similar "war stories." Such situations will always occur. The team management approach, or any other approach, can't prevent them. What we have found, though, is that with this approach we have been able to minimize the negative effects of such a situation; and we think that you might be able to do the same. Before you consider the team management approach for yourself, you should be aware that there is a degree of risk involved in it. The risk is especially acute -- at least initially -- for the principals. Carolyn, since you were in that situation, perhaps you should explain.

The initial decisions must be made by you. As the principal of the school, you have been given, through law as well as district policy, the total responsibility for the operation of that school. If you choose to implement the management team approach, you have chosen to risk giving to your assistant principal tasks and responsibilities for which you will still ultimately be held accountable to your superintendent, the Board and the public.

Once the decision to risk has been made, you can begin to develop a management team approach. First, you must establish with your assistant principal a climate for growth -- both the assistant principal's and yours. You must get to know one another so that you can pinpoint each other's:

1. strengths
2. weaknesses
3. interests
4. background
5. person/personality

This in itself is a challenge. It requires that you and your assistant principal honestly admit that you are not skilled and well versed in particular areas. Of course, addressing your strengths is usually simpler -- but, even there, how often do you take time to analyze your performance for strengths?

Once you have begun to really get to know your team member, you must use that information to make a deliberate match of your talents and resources with the needs and interests of the school. I am not sure that the process of getting to know each other is ever completed. People grow... they change.

While the assignment of tasks and responsibilities provides the basic framework for the management team approach, in order that the system works -- rather than simply being a realignment of traditional duties -- the principal (and, in a management team, the assistant principal as well) has several obligations:

1. awareness of total and administrative picture
2. planned growth opportunities
3. provision for on-the-job training
4. planned and informal communications system
5. formal and informal feed-back -- straight/skinny
6. a plan for your own succession

This is the process that evolved for us. However, it didn't begin as a full-blown plan.

Two years ago in July, Carolyn, who had been a principal in our district, was reassigned to the school where I had been an assistant principal. For the past year, however, I had been in another assignment and was returning to the school that July. We began meeting together in May. Our first meeting was typical of two people who didn't really know each other well but knew that they had to work together. We began -- or actually Carolyn began -- by having us both describe our likes and dislikes in terms of a building operation -- strengths and weaknesses were too much to expect on a first meeting!

From our discussion, and subsequent discussions, I learned that Carolyn liked, and had strengths in, the area of staff development, public relations, curriculum, time management, evaluation and kids -- not necessarily in that order! -- but was not particularly fond of working on budgets or the building per se. Little by little, Carolyn came to realize that my strengths were in staff report -- remember, I already knew the staff in the building -- organization, the building, evaluations and budget. I did not feel strong in the area of K-5 curriculum because my teaching background was in junior high school -- and public relations was really not my "bag." Once we moved into the building, we continued to learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses.

In September we addressed the topic of staff evaluation by doing several joint observations. We jointly observed the teacher but wrote our observations separately. We discovered that we were very similar in our perceptions and our style. There were, however, some differences in format that we retained because they were comfortable for us. Throughout the year, we continued to get to know each other and gradually we developed our areas of inidividual and joint responsibility.

This Management Team Task Assessment, completed by Carolyn, in our building operation should give you an overall view on our style.

I think it's important to notice that if this were filled out two years from now, after we had worked together for another two years, you might see us moving even more toward the center in some of these areas.

We have been speaking mostly to the strengths of the team management approach. Please don't assume from that that there are no negatives. To say there weren't would be foolish. Some of them are built into the system. Some of them come from the outside, through the reactions of other people to the system. Carolyn, maybe you can better describe them.

"Hartley, what the hell are you trying to pull?" When I heard that comment, I knew I was in trouble with the other principals... again.

In our district the meeting that spells power for principals is the annual staffing review with the Board of Education. Traditionally, the principal alone sits before the Board to outline staffing recommendations for the coming year. Since Pat and I had together been responsible for the evaluation process, we felt we should appear that way -- together. You need to expect unusual reactions from others in your district if you go with a management team approach.

A second pitfall you need to keep in mind is a perceived loss of power. Initially, your staff or parents may feel you are losing power or giving up the control a principal has. However, if you view power as knowledge, then you must realize that knowledge is doubled in a team of two, as can be your effectiveness.

Power is the problem for the assistant principal, too. Going to a district meeting and sitting with other principals with the expectation -- because of your frame of reference -- that you are an equal and to be viewed as less is a shock. Nothing major ever occurred. It's just that my ideas were always the last to be heard and the least considered.

A similar reaction often results from parents, staff and students. Someone will come to me and I will say no, they can't; or yes, they will; and they feel that they will do better if they try Carolyn. Initially, this takes more time for the staff member or the parent who has to go to both people and for both administrators who have to entertain the same problem; but, if the team is really working, little by little people learn that going from one person to the other will not help, and that one person's response is just as good as the other person's response.

A third pitfall I would share with you relates to the legalities. By law, you are totally responsible as the administrator of the building, no matter how well you delegate. You must outline these legalities clearly with your teammate so that care is taken in your approach.

With increased demands on your time, can you afford to continue separatism? Can you afford to continue following an out-moded, narrow definition of roles? We need to double our energy, talents and resources to meet the educational needs of today -- we need to work together as a team -- we are convinced you will find that two heads are better than one.

By the way, our team of two has moved to central office. May I introduce the Administrative Assistant for Personnel -- Miss Pat Brown.

And I'd like you to meet the Assistant Superintendent for Program and Staff Development, Carolyn Hartley.

Management Team Task Assessment

	Who Performs Task					Who Assigns Task	
	Only Principal		Either/ Both		Only Asst. Principal	Principal Decides	Team Decision
EVALUATION PROCESS							
Observes teachers	1	2	3	4	5		
Writes & signs final evaluations	1	2	3	4	5		
Informs staff of non-reemployment	1	2	3	4	5		
THE BUDGET							
Authorizes expenditures	1	2	3	4	5		
Prepares school budget	1	2	3	4	5		
Has working knowledge of budget	1	2	3	4	5		
DISCIPLINE							
Generally handled by	1	2	3	4	5		
Meets with parents in extreme cases	1	2	3	4	5		
CURRICULUM							
Revises and develops curriculum	1	2	3	4	5		
Selects instructional materials	1	2	3	4	5		
Monitors program effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5		
CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE							
Attends conventions, workshops, etc.	1	2	3	4	5		
FACILITIES							
Oversees upkeep of building	1	2	3	4	5		
Determines use of space	1	2	3	4	5		
STAFF DEVELOPMENT							
Plans staff development activities	1	2	3	4	5		
Conducts workshops	1	2	3	4	5		
Works with staff to remediate deficiencies	1	2	3	4	5		
SCHEDULES							
Develops master schedule	1	2	3	4	5		
STAFF/STUDENT RELATIONS							
Makes final decision on staff requests	1	2	3	4	5		
Counsels staff	1	2	3	4	5		
Conducts/supervises student activities	1	2	3	4	5		
Makes final decision on student activities	1	2	3	4	5		
PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS							
Accepts community speaking engagements as school representative	1	2	3	4	5		
Makes final decision on parent/ community requests	1	2	3	4	5		

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